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ABSTRACT

In light of research confirming the important effects of parents' literacy skills on their children's eventual acquisition of literacy skills, a project was undertaken in the Altoona Area School District in Blair County, Pennsylvania, to provide basic literacy training to a group of Head Start parents who were unable to read and who were not participating in an adult basic education (ABE) program. The project had four major objectives: provide basic literacy instruction to illiterate parents who were not currently being reached by the county's ABE program, counsel the targeted parents concerning the importance of reading as a family activity and as a method of improving children's chances for achieving success in school, provide opportunities for Head Start families to obtain reading materials for their children to keep at home, and train adult nonreaders to work with their preschool children on prereading skills. To promote the program, Head Start home aides disseminated literacy information to the parents with whom they were working. Those parents who were in need of the literacy program were interviewed and assessed by the literacy volunteer coordinator. Within a month, each parent was matched with a training literacy tutor who met with the adults on a one-to-one basis. Each family received seven books and a free subscription to "Sesame Street Magazine." At the end of the nine-month project, the adult students (who had been tutored between 1.5 and 4 hours each week) showed reading levels that had increased between 6 months and 2 years. It should, however, be noted that 50 percent of the audience originally targeted for the program chose not to participate, and up to 30 percent did not complete the program. (MN)

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DIVISION OF ADULT EDUCATION

FAMILY LITERACY

Grantee: Altoona Area Public Library
Blair County Literacy Council
1600 Fifth Avenue
Altoona, PA 16602
Project #86 98-7033
Amount of Grant $5,000
Shirley April, Coordinator

Grantor: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Education
Bureau of Vocational Education
Division of Adult Education and Training Programs
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Date: July 1, 1986 - June 30, 1987

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I. ABSTRACT

Title: Family Literacy

Address: Altoona Area Public Library
1600 Fifth Avenue
Altoona, PA 16602 Phone: (814)946-0417

Director: Shirley April, Literacy Coordinator

Funding: $5000

Duration: July 1, 1986 to June 30, 1987 Months: 12

Objectives:
Family literacy provided basic literacy training to illiterate Head Start parents in Blair County who were not enrolled in an ABE program. The program included counseling, distributing of home reading materials, and the training of parents in pre-reading skills.

Description:
The Literacy Volunteer Program, under the auspices of the Altoona Area School District and the Altoona Area Public Library, worked with Blair County Head Start to identify illiterate families whose children were enrolled at Head Start. The home aides encouraged these families to become involved in the literacy program to enable them to work with their own children on pre-reading skills. The program utilized the RIF Program as well as Sesame Street Magazine to train the parents. The adults were also availed of Laubach training for themselves.

Target Audience: Illiterate parents of Head Start children.

Product: Does not apply.

Method Of Evaluation:
All participants, including tutors, Head Start teachers and families, were surveyed at the beginning and end of the program to determine the amount of improvement in the targeted families' and children's pre-reading or basic reading skills.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of Problem

"Most experts in the field (of Education) view the intergenerational transfer of illiteracy as a major target of efforts to overcome the problem" (BCEL Newsletter, 1/86). To hinder such transfer - as Sharon Darling, State Director of Adult Education in Kentucky, testified before the House (November, 1985) we need to "address the educational needs of the parents. Adult educators need to work as partners with early childhood specialists to design model programs which appeal to the recognized need of the parent, and bring the child into the program to benefit from the parent's learning" (AAACE Newsletter, 1/86).

B. Objectives

The Altoona Area Public Library's Literacy Volunteer Program, working in coordination with Blair County Head Start, developed a Family Literacy Program to work with those illiterate families whose children were enrolled at Head Start. Our specific objectives were:

1. To provide basic literacy services to adult non-readers not being served by the ABE Program, whose children were enrolled in Blair County Head Start.
2. To counsel the targeted audience concerning the

importance of reading as a family activity and as a method of improving the child's chances of success in school.

3. To provide opportunities for Head Start families to obtain reading materials for their children to keep at home.
4. To train adult non-readers to work with pre-school children on pre-reading skills.

C. Procedures Employed

The literacy coordinator met with Head Start Family Services staff to coordinate methods of counseling the targeted illiterate families. To promote the program the Head Start's home aides disseminated literacy information to the parents with whom they were working. The aides explained how the parents could have a free volunteer tutor who would help them to learn to read themselves and to work with their own children. Following this initial contact the Literacy Volunteer coordinator spoke to parents at a PTO class committee meeting, emphasizing the importance of reading to young children. A newsletter was sent home by the Head Start staff. It explained the program and urged parents to avail themselves of this free reading service if they lacked basic reading skills. Then, once the home aides identified

those parents needing tutoring or parents would otherwise request assistance, the Literacy Volunteer coordinator interviewed the parents and assessed their reading ability in order to develop an individual educational plan for them. Within one month of this assessment each adult was matched with a trained literacy tutor who met with him or her on a one-to-one basis in the adult's home community.

Within a month of the beginning of tutoring of the parents, the Literacy Volunteer coordinator began distribution of RIF (Reading is Fundamental) books not only to the children of these parents, but to all 257 Head Start children. In all, there were 4 distributions of books. For the first distribution, the theme The Little Engine That Could was used. The children were given cardboard engineer hats supplied by Amtrak and the story The Little Engine That Could was read to them by their teachers. Then the literacy coordinator arrived with a cardboard train filled with books for distribution. The children were encouraged that they too could have fun reading. They were then given the opportunity to select a book from the train to keep as their own. Two clowns accompanied the 2nd distribution of books a few months later. The clowns made balloon animals for the children. Then the chil-

dren selected books to take home. For the 3rd distribution of books, a play store was set up. Children were given play money to buy a book of their own. A puppet show, sponsored by the Altoona Area Public Library's children department, was given in conjunction with the final distribution of books. In addition to these distributions to all children, the targeted families received a pre-school activity book and a subscription to Sesame Street Magazine. The pre-school activity book and the Sesame Street Magazine enabled the parents to work with their pre-schoolers on pre-reading skills, in the manner that they were learning from their tutors. Also, when children selected books that were too difficult for them or their parents to read, tutors would distribute more appropriate books to them.

D. Time Frame

October-November 1986 - Met with Head Start staff to formulate program and identify illiterate parents. Applied for RIF membership.

December 1986 - Interviewed and tested potential adult students. Ordered books for 1st RIF distribution.

January 1987 - Held workshop to train tutors. Placed adult students with literacy volunteer tutors. Distributed RIF books to Blair County Head Start students. Ordered Sesame Street Magazine.

February 1987 - Ordered books for 2nd RIF distribution.

February-June 1987 - Tracked progress of students and tutors by means of tutor monthly reports and periodic home visits by Head Start aides.

March 1987 - Tutors attended an inservice meeting. Distributed RIF books. Ordered books for 3rd RIF distribution.

April 1987 - Distributed RIF books. Ordered books for 4th and final RIF distribution.

May 1987 - Distributed RIF books.

June 1987 - Reassessed adult students. Wrote final report.

E. Administration

Shirley April, Literacy Coordinator for the Literacy Volunteer Program, directed the entire program; she was especially active in acquiring materials, assessing student progress, organizing a workshop and an inservice meeting, distributing RIF books, maintaining records, carrying on correspondence, and writing the final report.

Matt Kane, Consultant Librarian for the Altoona Area Public Library, oversaw the budget.

Jane Jantzer-Wilson, an independent tutor-trainer, trained the tutors in the Laubach method.

Ruth Ann Akers, Coordinator of Family Services and Romaine Fleming, Parents Involvement Coordinator for Blair County Head Start with the cooperation of their home aides, identified the targeted audience and promoted the program among them.

F. Target Audience

Literacy program coordinator or staff working with non-literate parents of Head Start children.

III. EVALUATION OF THE ACHIEVEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

Objective I

To provide basic literacy service to adult non-readers not being served by the ABE Program whose children were enrolled in Blair County Head Start.

This objective has been met. Adult students were tutored from 1½ to 4 hours per week on basic literacy skills. Their reading levels increased from ½ year to 2 years.

Objective II

To counsel the target audience concerning the importance of reading as a family activity and as a method of improving a child's chances of success in school.

This objective has been met. The Family Literacy Coordinator, the Head Start home aides, and the tutors all teamed together in providing counseling on the importance of reading activities in the family unit particularly as related to pre-schoolers.

Objective III

To provide opportunities for Head Start families to obtain reading materials for their children to keep at home.

Head Start families enrolled in the Family Literacy Program received 7 books to keep at home. Four books were chosen by the child at Head Start and 3 others were selected by the Literacy Coordinator and given to the parents for their children. Included in the latter 3 were a Nursery Rhyme book and an ABC book.

Objective IV

To train adult non-readers to work with their pre-school children on pre-reading skills.

This objective was partially met. Reading materials were not individually tailored and as a result not always appropriate for child or parent. Sesame Street Magazine was not always a useful teaching tool. For some, both parents and children, the magazine was too advanced to be used. So a pre-school activity book which was better suited for some of these children was substituted.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This project sought to break the cycle of illiteracy that passes from non-literate parents to children. For the 20% to 50% of the targeted audience (identified by Head Start) who participated in the program, success was evident and dramatic. Parents had reading materials at home to read to their children. Bedtime stories became part of their daily routine. Before enrolling in this program, these children had not been read to because many of the parents lacked the confidence and skills necessary for reading. Parents worked on pre-reading skills with their pre-schoolers. Some teachers noted a marked improvement in school, for these children became more verbal and showed an increase in attention span. The children enjoyed being read to and benefited from the pre-reading skills activities.

However, 50% of the targeted audience chose not to participate at all, and up to 30% did not complete the program.

In a number of cases, parents who read at a 3rd or 4th grade level overestimated their own abilities; in other cases, simple pride seemed to discourage their participation. We recommend that ways be investigated to convince these readers to assess their reading abilities objectively and to otherwise motivate them to participate. Overall, using the Head Start program as a vehicle for improving family literacy and upgrading the reading skills of parents succeeded to the point that we have incorporated the Family Literacy program as a permanent basic service of our Literacy Volunteer Program.